



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Pope John XXII, Papal Bull *Teachings of the Holy Fathers* (1324)

The Roman Catholic Church can trace its roots back to the arrival of Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome in the years immediately after the death of Christ. Thus it has been in place in Rome, in one form or another, for nearly two millennia. Any institution of such great longevity is likely also to be of a conservative nature, maintaining its most sacred traditions. In reading the contents of Robert F. Hayburn's *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1977), the traditionalist nature of the official pronouncements of the Church regarding music becomes apparent. The earliest popes decree that the liturgy is to be followed faithfully, in part to honor the memory of Pope Gregory the Great, believed then to be the progenitor of Gregorian chant. Typical of those pronouncements enjoining the clergy to adhere to the traditional rites is a papal bull issued by Leo IV (847–855) that reads in part:

For if you abhor our teaching and tradition of our holy leader that you do not follow our rite in all its details in the sung parts and the readings, be advised that we cast you out from communion with us, since it behooves you to follow with profit all those things which the Roman Church does not reject but desires and tenaciously holds. [p. 8]

The clergy, even the prelates, of the Church are sometimes less that devoted celebrants of the liturgy, judging from the following lamentation of Pope Gregory IX (1227–1241):

We mention with sorrow that not only certain lesser clerics, but even some prelates of the Church spend almost half the night in unnecessary banquets and illicit conversations. As a result they give the remainder of the night to sleep, so that they are barely aroused for the Divine Office [Matins] at the singing of the birds. Moreover, they pass the morning in a continual trance. [p. 12]

Similarly, Pope Clement V (1304–1313), the pope who moved the papacy to Avignon in 1309, complained about clerical dereliction of liturgical duties. Some seem to have preferred hunting, hawking, and dancing to chanting, reading, and praying.

We are greatly disturbed that many ministers of the Church presume to celebrate the Divine Office in an unbecoming manner and that they are often present at it with too little devotion. They run through the recitation or chanting of the Canonical Hours; they daydream. They take part in extraneous, often vain, worldly and unbecoming conversations. Moreover they sometimes go falconing, or they ride to the hounds.

On the vigils of the established feasts, some others, both clerics and laymen, do not fear to dance licentiously in the church cemeteries, and at times sing silly songs. Moreover, they do this when they ought to be assisting at prayers in the churches.

We decree . . . that in cathedrals and in the churches of the religious orders [monasteries], in collegiate churches [large urban churches without bishops] that the Canonical Hours should be devoutly chanted. In monastic churches let the day and night hours of the Divine office be celebrated in a reasonable and fitting manner, if those concerned wish to avoid the indignation of God and of the Apostolic See [the pope]. [p. 13]

One of Pope Clement's immediate successors at Avignon, Pope John XXII, offered the most scathing condemnation of avant-garde church music when he issued *Docta sanctorum patrum* (*Teachings of the Holy Fathers*) in 1324. As Chapter 10 indicates, John was no friend of the fancy rhythmic complexities of the *Ars nova*, for they lacerated or obscured the ancient chant.

But certain practitioners of the new school, who think only of the laws of measured time, are composing new melodies of their own creation, with a new system of note values, that they prefer to the ancient, traditional music. The melodies of the Church are [now] sung in semibreves and minims and with grace notes of repercussion. Some [composers] break up their melodies with hockets or rob them of their virility with discant, three-voice music, and motets, with a dangerous element produced by certain parts sung on text in the vernacular; all these abuses have brought into disrepute the basic melodies of the Antiphonal and Gradual [the principal chant books]. These composers, knowing nothing of the true foundation upon which they must build, are ignorant of the church modes, incapable of distinguishing between them, and cause great confusion. The great number of notes in their compositions conceals from us the plainchant melody, with its simple well-regulated rises and falls that indicate the character of the church mode. These musicians run without pausing. They intoxicate the ear without satisfying it; they dramatize the text with gestures; and, instead of promoting devotion, they prevent it by creating a sensuous and indecent atmosphere. . . .

Therefore, after consultation with these same brethren (the cardinals), we prohibit absolutely, for the future that anyone should do such things, or others of like nature, during the Divine Office or during the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Should anyone disobey, by the authority of this law he will be punished by suspension from his office during eight days. . . .

At the end of this broadside against the extremes of progressive-style music, Pope John XXII offers an olive branch to the musical rebels: he will allow them to continue to sing old-style organum in octaves, fifths, and fourths, presumably in parallel motion, of the sort favored around the year 1000 as discussed in Chapter 7.

However, we do not intend to forbid the occasional use—principally on solemn feasts at Mass and at Divine Office—of certain consonant intervals superposed upon the simple ecclesiastical chant, provided these harmonies are in the spirit and character of the melodies themselves, as, for instance, the consonance of the octave, the fifth, the fourth, and others of this nature; . . . for such consonances are pleasing to the ear and arouse devotion, and they prevent torpor among those who sing in honor of God.

Made and promulgated at Avignon in the Ninth Year of Our Pontificate. [p. 21]

Source: Translated from the original Latin of the bull *Docta sanctorum patrum* as given in *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. a. 1582 1879), Vol. I, pp. 1256–1257.